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President's Notes: Challenge!

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CHALLENGE!

The proposition to erect the institution now known as the Naval War College was not received with favor by the naval profession. It was said to be chimerical, impracticable, and wholly uncalled for. Moreover, there was no precedent for such a thing to be found in history.

Luce: "The U.S. Naval War College,"
U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings,
June 1910.

One of the first challenges facing the Naval War College in its early years was that of survival--survival in a world of rival bureaus, professional criticism, and outspoken hostility. "In six months my boys will be eating their grub in the lecture room of the War College!" stated the commanding officer of the training station at Newport.

To meet this challenge--to devise "an advanced course of professional study" which would establish for all time the worth of the College to the Navy and to the Nation--it was necessary to "collect, digest, and arrange in suitable form for instruction the branches which it (had) to teach" and, concomitantly, develop methods and techniques for the analysis, study, and practice of both the science and art of war. One of the techniques developed during those formative years was war gaming.

War gaming had long been a recognized educational technique for training Army officers. But at the time the College was struggling for its existence, the application of war gaming techniques to naval operations was a rela-



tively unknown and virtually untried art. The staff of the College developed gaming into a "laboratory method" for the simulation of naval warfare and established it "as a recognized part of the College curriculum." As developed, the purpose of war gaming was to provide "a practice field for the acquirement of skill and experience in the conduct or direction of war, and an experimental and trial ground for the testing of strategic and tactical plans."

One of the early presidents of the College observed: "The strategic game teaches the Admiral how to dispose his forces in a maritime campaign, the tactical game how to handle his fleet in action." During the winter of 1906-07, as a result of studies and tactical games, "Battle Plan No. 1 . . . was perfected and sent to the Fleet for trial." Capt. William McCarty Little in an article in the December 1912 issue of the *U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings* stated that "The principle of the concentration of the Fleet, now generally accepted in our navy, was the direct result of a strategic game . . ." conducted in 1903.

Adm. William S. Sims, famed World War I naval commander and postwar president of the Naval War College, wrote: "The principles of the war game constitute the backbone of our profession . . . At the Naval War College our

entire Fleet . . . can be maneuvered on the game board . . . against a similar fleet representing a possible enemy . . .” During the 1920’s and 1930’s, many of the officers who were to become the leaders of World War II participated in these games, among them Fleet Admirals King and Nimitz, and Admirals Spruance and Halsey. After World War II, Admiral Nimitz said: “The war with Japan had been reenacted in the game rooms (of the College) by so many people and in so many different ways that nothing that happened during the war was a surprise-absolutely nothing except the Kamikaze tactics toward the end of the war; we had not visualized those.”

During the 1950’s, gaming and simulation became an accepted operational research technique; its uses spread to industry and research activities. Each of the services established service-level gaming activities, that of the Navy under the Assistant to the Chief of Naval Operations for War Gaming Matters. The Joint Chiefs of Staff established the Joint War Games Agency to conduct political-military games and coordinate the joint-gaming activities of the various services. Business organizations and universities adapted gaming techniques to their training requirements, one of the first such management games appearing after “an exploratory visit to the Naval War College” by its designers. At the College many changes were made in both the scope and techniques of gaming. A global-level political game was developed, an electronic war gaming system installed, and joint and combined operations games devised. More recently, portions of CNO-sponsored studies have been subjected to the interplay of opposing teams of officers; fleet exercise and war

plans have been gamed by the officers responsible for their planning and execution. Commenting on a recent fleet game, an amphibious group commander stated: “Unlike real force exercises, (in games) opposing sea and air forces can exchange ‘live’ weapons and suffer damage with a real impact on planned force employment.” He noted also that plans could be examined and staffs trained “with an economy of ships and men so necessary today.”

Despite the impressive contributions of war gaming to date, we cannot—we will not—rest on our oars; as in the past we will continue to expand the scope of gaming, improve its techniques, update its facilities. The possibility of increased curriculum gaming will be examined; greater participation by fleet commands encouraged. More political, economic, and logistic factors will be incorporated into our games; liaison with other gaming activities, military and civilian, improved. The possible extension of gaming techniques to other areas such as counterinsurgency and management will be considered. Can the Soviets “out-flank NATO to the South, without firing a gun?” What about a “Fight and Talk” situation? Games can dynamically examine these problems, move versus countermove. Tensions in the Middle East? A multisided game should provide greater insight into their causes, suggest and test possible courses of action to meet future contingencies.

Present short-range plans for the College’s gaming facility include the installation of digital equipment, an improved display system, better communications; long-range plans envision a new and viable large-scale gaming center, one that will incorporate new gaming concepts and new equipment. With the extension of gaming into new

and vital areas, and with the aid of improved facilities and equipment, gaming will continue to provide "a practice field for the acquirement of skill and experience in the conduct or direction of war, and an experimental and trial ground for the testing of strategic and tactical plans," thus helping the College meet the challenges

of tomorrow in much the same manner as it did when, in its early years, the College was struggling for survival.



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Editor's note: The February 1969 issue was incorrectly numbered Volume XXI, Number 11; it should be Number 6.
